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ABSTRACT

Secondary students in the New Haven, Connecticut schools are offered a community high school program as an alternative to traditional education. The program is committed to three basic goals: (1) building student skills; (2) increasing student motivation to learn; and (3) encouraging students to become responsible, independent members of society. An individualized instructional approach is emphasized with a pupil/teacher ratio of less than ten to one. Community volunteers teach the more than 160 course offerings per year such as "Messing Around with Plants," "Can I See your Drivers License?" and "Coming of Age in America." Credit can also be earned through student volunteer work in community projects such as a community health clinic. Courses are offered on the basis of student interest and teacher availability. Some 40-45 percent of the course offerings are held in various locations throughout the city. Student performance is evaluated with personal narrative reports from teachers, rather than the traditional letter or number grades. An independent evaluation team continually evaluates the program and indicates success in the program. (Author/JR)

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For further information, write:

George Foote
The High School In the Community
197 Dixwell Avenue
New Haven, Connecticut 06511

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HIGH SCHOOL IN THE COMMUNITY: PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES IN EDUCATION

Is it possible for a high school with 18 teachers and 280 students to have a pupil/teacher ratio of less than ten to one? To offer more than 160 courses each year? To reduce operating costs enough to allow four times as much to be spent for materials? At High School in the Community, New Haven, Connecticut, the staff answers "yes" to all three questions.

High School in the Community (HSC) was founded four years ago to offer New Haven students an alternative to the standard high school program. HSC was not to be an honors, remedial, or vocational program. It was to serve a cross section of community young people, both college and noncollege bound. Above all, HSC was to provide some true options to students working toward their high school diplomas.

High School in the Community has sought to accomplish its purpose by becoming a part of the community and by encouraging the community to become a part of the school. HSC has called on community citizens to serve as volunteer teachers; it has used community resources to increase the number of courses it offers. By using free-of-charge space in community buildings, HSC has significantly reduced its operating costs. The result of the joint effort has benefited both the school and the New Haven community.

STUDENTS NEEDING ALTERNATIVES

The motivation for High School in the Community was student need. Several teachers in New Haven high schools recognized students in their classes for whom the traditional high school program was not working. Some of the students were labeled "troublemakers," others were students performing far below their measured potential. A nucleus of teachers went to the New Haven Board of Education with a proposal for an alternative school to serve such students. The Board approved their plan and provided standard funding. A Title III grant was also secured, and HSC officially opened in 1970.

Admission to HSC is open to any New Haven resident who is eligible to attend the city's secondary schools; prospective students apply by completing an application form. Each year new openings are filled from these applications by means of neighborhood lotteries. The neighborhood lottery system is used to insure a good cross section of students from the entire community.

When HSC opened, the staff felt it was important that students experience a small school atmosphere--an atmosphere that would promote real teacher-student communication. To help develop that environment the school was divided into two units, each with 160 students. Units were housed in separate locations and had separate curriculums, but the same teachers served both units. With four years' experience, the staff now feels the same atmosphere can be created without the separation of students, and after September 1974 all students will be housed together.

HSC is committed to three basic goals: (1) to build students' skills, (2) to increase students' motivation to learn, and (3) to encourage students to become responsible, independent members of society. Reaching these goals requires an individual approach for each HSC student.

DEVELOPING STAFF ALTERNATIVES

The HSC staff quickly recognized that providing alternatives for individual students required considerable "person power": a small faculty could offer only a limited number of alternatives. To expand the number of options available to students, the HSC staff went in search of community citizens who would serve as volunteer teachers. They sought people with professional training, such as an attorney who could teach a course in local aspects of constitutional law; and they looked for people with special interests or talents, like an artist who could teach the silk screening process.

The volunteer teachers at HSC number between 100 and 125 each year. The multitude of talents they bring to HSC greatly expands the number and variety of courses the school is able to offer. The expanded faculty also reduces the average pupil/teacher ratio to less than ten to one.

Are unpaid teachers difficult to enlist? George Foote, HSC facilitator (administrator), emphasizes that HSC has never had a problem recruiting volunteers. Many people hear about the program and come to the school to offer their services. If the staff needs a specialized person to teach a skill or subject, a community search is begun; nearly always a willing teacher is located.

The curriculum of High School in the Community offers students a wide range of learning alternatives.

small group learning

independent study

To make the best use of volunteer talent, the regular HSC faculty provides some supervision of the lay teachers. Before a volunteer begins teaching, a staff member helps the person "rough out" a curriculum plan and gives some teaching suggestions. During the year the volunteers' classes are occasionally monitored, and volunteer teachers are provided with assistance on request.

When HSC began, faculty members supervised the volunteer teachers in addition to performing their own teaching duties. According to Foote, the job became overwhelming and some of the volunteers were left with little or no supervision. Now HSC employs a full-time community coordinator whose function is to monitor volunteer teachers' work and to give assistance when needed. The coordinator is also responsible for finding new lay teachers.

HSC has 21 paid faculty members: 18 full-time teachers, plus a counselor, a community coordinator, and a facilitator. All staff members teach at least one class.

Like the HSC students, teachers must apply directly to the school to be considered for a position. Applications are initially screened by a Policy Council composed of students, teachers, and parents. Foote feels the application and screening process produces applicants who really want to teach at HSC, an important factor. In his judgment, "It just wouldn't work to assign teachers to a school like this."

Experience at HSC has demonstrated that teachers with previous teaching experience adjust more easily to the alternative program than do inexperienced teachers. It is necessary that teachers be flexible, willing to experiment, and above all have a good supply of time and energy. The HSC milieu is demanding.

BUILDING CURRICULUM ALTERNATIVES

The hallmark of an alternative school is its curriculum, and the HSC curriculum offers many alternatives--more than 160 courses per year. Credit can be earned in courses with intriguing names like "Coming of Age in America or Can I See Your Driver's License" and "Messing Around with Plants"; or credit can be acquired by volunteer work in projects such as a community health clinic or a farm workers' boycott.

With dozens of courses from which to choose each year, students are carefully counseled to make choices that are both interesting to them and important in their overall school experience. Requirements for graduation are the same for HSC as any other New Haven high school, so certain basic requirements must be met. In addition, students are tested at the beginning of their first year at HSC; if they are found deficient in certain skill areas they are counseled to enroll in classes which will help remedy their weaknesses.

Courses are offered on the basis of student interest and teacher availability. Within a year's curriculum, core courses in science, English, social studies, and math are always offered; however, more specialized courses like "History of the U.S. Merchant Marine" or "Women and Health" are also available. Interested

individual tutoring

practical experience

students and a qualified teacher can initiate almost any reasonable course, and an individual student can pursue a subject in a tutorial arrangement with a teacher if no other students are interested.

Some 40 to 45 percent of the courses offered each year are held away from the HSC building in locations throughout the city. Such courses are often taught by volunteer teachers who hold the classes in their place of business. Classes are conducted in police stations, hospitals, courts, architectural firms, elementary schools, nature centers, data processing firms, printing plants, libraries, and dozens of other locations. Students are also encouraged to earn credit by participating in activities such as the American Red Cross, adult education programs, Junior Achievement, and citizen action groups.

This outreach aspect of the HSC program is called Community Orientation Program or COP. The HSC staff feels the COP program is one of the clear ways the "school gets into the community and the community gets into the school." Through COP, High School in the Community is discovering new answers to the questions "what is there to learn, how can it be learned, and who can teach it?"

ALTERNATIVE GRADING

One of the innovations at HSC has been to do away with letter or number grades. In place of such grades HSC students receive personal, narrative reports from their teachers.

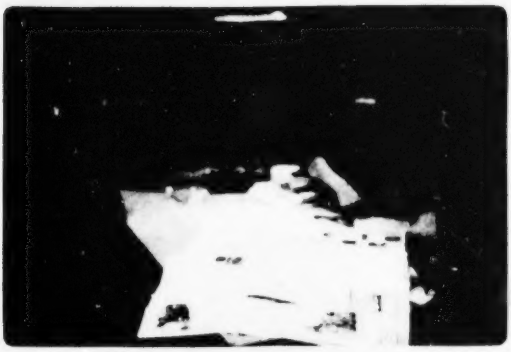
HSC's school year is divided into four marking periods; at the end of a period students receive an evaluation report for each of their courses. A report (1) describes the content of the course; (2) discusses the quality of the student's work; (3) indicates the relationship between the student's achievement and his potential; and (4) makes suggestions to the student for improving his/her work. An example of a completed report can be seen on the last page.

Reaction to the use of evaluation forms has been generally favorable. Foote reports that initially teachers had difficulty adjusting to the report system, because it required them to keep notes on each student throughout the semester. Without such notes it was impossible to write an accurate evaluation at the end of the period. Foote attempts to review all the reports before they are given to students; if a report is considered inadequate, the teacher is asked to do it again.

Students are somewhat ambivalent in their feelings about the reporting system, but they do seem to feel uncomfortable about unfavorable reports. Parents like the reports when they are well done--complete, accurate, helpful--but become upset if the reports are uninformative.

In the early days of the program, when it was decided to replace letter grades with evaluative reports, the HSC staff invited admission representatives from several area colleges to a meeting at which the reporting system was explained and discussed. Perhaps because of this early communication, there have been no repercussions from the evaluation report system when HSC students apply for college admission.

cooperative projects



timely studies

IMPROVING THE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

The HSC staff is described by Foote as "quite introspective and very self-critical." From the beginning, the faculty at HSC has been dedicated to improving the program. One step in this direction was the appointment of an independent evaluation team, headed by Professor John McConahay of Yale University, to continually evaluate HSC.

The evaluative team has two functions. First, during the course of the school year, the team provides a flow of data and suggestions for consideration by the HSC faculty. To do this the team observes classroom situations and uses various measurement instruments to evaluate what they see.

The information derived from the observations is written up in a narrative report and given to the respective teachers. An example of the kind of information included in an evaluation might be an analysis of the percentage of class time during which the teacher dominates. If a teacher finds he/she is dominating 80 percent of the time during a "group" discussion, the teacher may wish to employ new methods for encouraging student participation.

The second function of the evaluation team is to provide an overall evaluation at the end of each school year. Part of this evaluation usually contains a comparison of HSC student achievement test scores with scores of students in other city high schools. The team also measures sociological factors such as student affiliation with the school and racial attitudes. All this information is used by the teachers to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in the program and to redesign curriculum accordingly.

The task undertaken by HSC to provide alternative education has not been simple. Foote recalls that in the first year or two teachers in other New Haven schools seemed determined to make HSC a dumping ground for their behavior problems. Fortunately that destiny was avoided, and HSC now attracts a population well-balanced between students who have been unsuccessful in other programs and students who just like the HSC model.

Has HSC been able to meet the needs of its students? The evidence suggests it has. The evaluation team has found that HSC students compare well with their counterparts on achievement tests; more than 65 percent of the HSC graduates are admitted to colleges and universities. Students demonstrate a strong affiliation with the school, and Foote reports few behavioral problems. Community visitors to the school often comment about the social sophistication of the HSC students and the poise they display in talking with adults.

The ultimate alternative for HSC students is their choice to apply to the program and their choice to leave the program at any time. The fact that many students apply and few students leave before graduating may be the best indication that HSC's alternative program is accomplishing its goal.

The High School in the Community
197 Dixwell Avenue
New Haven, Connecticut 06511
Telephone: 562-0151 Ext. 1363

Student Lynda | Seminar Group Anderson

Course Name & No. Journalism | Marking Period 4th

Teacher Lichtenstein (English teacher) | Credit Earned Year 1 Term 1/2

Teacher's Phone | Attendance 7 absences out of 27.

These comments take the place of letter grades and are designed to describe and evaluate the student's individual educational progress.

I. Course Description (course length, content, goals, requirements, and level of difficulty):

The purpose of this course has been to introduce the class members to the fundamental techniques of newspaper and yearbook production. This was to be done through the production of either or both publications. Basic skills and advice were given by the instructor. How they were to be utilized was determined by the class.

II. Academic Achievement and Progress:

A. Academic Achievement (mastery of material): *Lynda was able to assimilate all of the instructional materials and information that were presented to the class. She chose to concentrate on the writing aspects of journalism rather than production techniques. She wrote assorted pieces and collected materials for the literary section of the yearbook. Her ability to organize a story showed definite improvement through the year.*

B. Progress made in relation to potential and previous work:
Lynda did not progress as fast as she might have or gain competency over as wide a range of skills as possible. This is at least partially true because she chose not to give her full attention to the course and allowed other interests to conflict with class time and assignments.

C. Suggestions for improvement:

Lynda has considerable potential in the field of journalism. Her writing skills are adequate and she is, through concentration, capable of improving them. When she chooses to exercise them she has many leadership qualities which cause people to follow her directions and look to her for guidance.

III. Comments (student's strengths and weaknesses, initiative, resourcefulness, unusual circumstances affecting work, class participation, etc.):

If Lynda wants to fully exploit her talents she should use them more intensely rather than allow herself to be sidetracked. It was for this reason that she not exercise as much influence over the yearbook and newspaper as she might have.

Edward Lichtenstein
Signature

Supervising Teacher Same

Date 6/18/72

ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 084 287 - Alternative Schools Outside the Public School System in Minneapolis 1971: A Description of Secondary School Students Who Attended Them. By Lary Johnson and R. W. Faunce. 25 pp. MF - $.75, HC - $1.50. This paper describes the attitudes of students who attended three alternative high schools. Implications of the study for public school systems are discussed.

ED 080 423 - City School. First Year Report. By City School, Madison, Wisconsin. 112 pp. MF - $.75, HC - $5.40. The central purpose of City School is to foster growth in interpersonal communication among students and to build community involvement. Over 60 community people were involved in teaching programs. The planning process is described and results of the program are given.

ED 077 087 - Gateway High School: "School Without Walls." An Evaluation. By Orleans Parish School Board, New Orleans, La. 58 pp. MF - $.75, HC - $3.15. This document describes a program which obtained community resource personnel on a volunteer basis and in which students went into the community for many of their courses.

ED 066 812 - Alternative High Schools: Some Pioneer Programs. Suzanne K. Stemnock. 58 pp. MF - $.75, hardcopy available from Educational Research Service, Box 5, NEA Building, 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 - $5.00. The programs discussed in this document are those sponsored by public school systems with enrollments of 12,000 or more in which students voluntarily enroll as an option to the regular high school program available in their district.